

The sweetest season

By Kim Foley MacKinnon
GATEHOUSE NEWS SERVICE

With the spring thaw comes one of New England's biggest treats, maple syrup. The sweet stuff is duly celebrated with a plethora of maple sugaring events this month.

Start your maple sugar education at the New England Maple Museum (802-483-9414, www.maple-museum.com) in Pittsford, Vt.

**IN
NEW
ENGLAND**

You will learn that American Indians discovered how to turn maple sap into sugar by slashing the tree and boiling the sap.

The process has changed somewhat, but the end

result is the same - a liquid gold, uniquely New England. At the museum, you'll find exhibits, live demonstrations and, of course, delicious samples.

Vermont's 7th annual Maple Open House Weekend is March 28-30 (802-763-7435, www.vermontmaple.org). Many of the state's sugaring houses have special tastings, demonstrations and hands-on activities. At the Bragg Farm Sugarhouse in East Montpelier you can listen to live music, sample "sugar on snow" and walk along the farm's maple trail (802-223-5757, www.bragg-farm.com). Make a weekend of it at the West Mountain Inn located in Arlington (802-375-6516, www.westmountaininn.com). The 1849 farmhouse-turned-inn offers a "March Maple Madness" package for \$205 per person, including two nights' accommodations, five-course dinner, a map to nearby sugar houses and a pint of maple syrup.

New Hampshire celebrates the same weekend with open houses throughout the state. At the Prescott Farm Audubon Center on March 29, you can tap your own bucket of sap and learn the science of turning it to syrup (603-366-5695, www.nhaudubon.org/sanctuaries/prescott.htm). For other sugar houses and activities, call 603-225-3757 or visit www.nhmapleproducers.com.

Maine's annual maple sugar party traditional-

ly happens on the fourth Sunday of March - March 23 this year. That also happens to be

Easter, so many sugar houses will celebrate on March 22 instead. At the Old Fort Western, built in 1754 and the country's oldest remaining wooden fort, you can stop by on March 23 between 1 and 3 p.m. to see trees tapped and sap boiled down the 18th century way (207-626-2385, www.oldfortwestern.org). Maine Maple Producers has a full list of open houses and activities (207-634-3521, www.mainemapleproducers.com).

Book the "Maine Maple Weekend" package at Meadowmere Resort in Ogunquit, and you'll receive two nights' accommodations (March 21 and 22), sugar shack tours, dinner one night and breakfasts for \$145 per person

(800-633-8718, www.meadowmere.com).

Many sugar houses are open throughout the sugaring season, not just for these special events. Call ahead to see if you can visit other times.

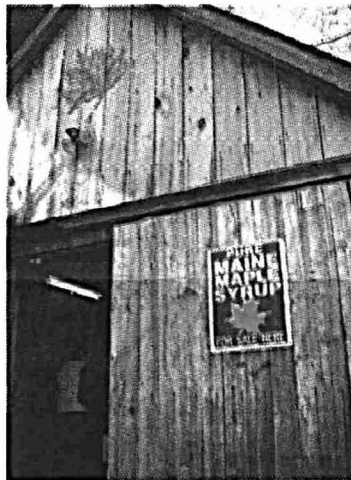


PHOTO COURTESY MAINE OFFICE OF TOURISM

Sugar houses like this one in Oxford County, Maine, create sweet maple syrup.





PHOTO COURTESY VERMONT TOURIST BOARD

Boiling the sap is part of the process in making maple syrup.

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